

**Testimony on Care4Kids Budget, Office of Early Childhood
Natalie Vieira, Early Childhood Policy Fellow, All Our Kin
Before the Appropriations Committee
February 21, 2017**

Good evening Senator Formica, Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Natalie Vieira, and I am the Policy Fellow at All Our Kin. All Our Kin trains and supports a network of over 400 family child care providers, who support children and families through licensed child care in home-based settings.

I am here to testify on the budget of the Office of Early Childhood as related to the child care subsidy program, Care4Kids. As you know, Care4Kids is currently closed to almost all new applicants. Governor Malloy's proposed budget makes cuts to Care4Kids that would keep the program closed for the next two years, eliminating access to child care for thousands of Connecticut families. This would damage our state's economy and cost far more than it would save.

We have already begun to see the economic impact when working parents cannot pay for child care. As a result of the current restricted Care4Kids eligibility requirements, child care providers are struggling to keep their doors open, parents are being forced to decline job opportunities or reduce working hours, and many of our state's youngest children are losing access to quality early care and education.

All Our Kin has collected survey data on the impact of Care4Kids eligibility cuts. Of the child care providers who completed our survey, 40% have recently had to cut back on household expenses as a result of lower enrollment in their programs. Reduced expenditures translate to fewer dollars spent on local businesses. The survey also revealed that 16% of providers have recently had to let go of a licensed assistant or substitute. Cuts to Care4Kids translate into lost jobs and a crumbling child care infrastructure in this state.

Some providers shared that as they struggle to make ends meet, they have had to apply for SNAP benefits, Medicaid, and energy assistance. If they lose their businesses, we will see increased need for state benefits. This goes for parents as well. According to Childcare Aware of America, a Connecticut family with two children can spend upwards of \$25,000 per year on child care. If Care4Kids remains closed, we will see more parents unable to participate in the workforce because they cannot pay for child care. Many will need to apply for state benefits, which ironically, may make them eligible for Care4Kids, since only current recipients of TANF are still eligible. Connecticut will end up paying twice over.

The workforce of tomorrow will suffer as well. Children's brains are literally built in the first few years of life. Research by Nobel Prize winning Professor James Heckman shows that investing in early childhood—even during a budget crisis—reduces social costs and promotes economic growth because children are better prepared to graduate high school and enter the workforce. Cuts to Care4Kids today risk Connecticut's tomorrow.

Our survey respondents are from 80 different zip codes. They represent a broad constituency who depend on Care4Kids to run small businesses and support the success of children and families. I urge you to fully fund Care4Kids so that the program can operate as intended, allowing parents to work, children to learn, and providers to maintain quality care programs. Thank you.